

Author? Miller?

Roy Grundmann's *Andy Warhol's Blow Job* is an historical and theoretical exploration of white gay male expression and desire that treats *Blow Job* as meta-commentary on discourses of sex and identity, and a metatext on gay performance in the postwar American public.

Grundmann relates "passing" and "posing" in *Blow Job* to social self-assertions of white gay male sexuality. Passing and posing are ways in which men at this time positioned themselves socially in response to homophobic spaces. They influenced gay styles, signifying practices, sensibility, and communities.

Grundmann refers to the man in the frame as a "poser" because regardless of whether or not he is actually receiving a blow job, we are aware of his performance. The image is always ambiguous: "the moment one becomes invested in a specific reading's plausibility in terms of the cultural assumptions that one has imported into *Blow Job*'s image, passing turns to posing." It plays with public anxieties about oral sex, gay sex, and effeminacy in men and exploits the trappings of sex talk through the tease of the profilmic. The voyeuristic viewer scrutinizes the image of the poser's face for "truth," evoking performativity and preventing consensus.

So *Blow Job*'s minimalism as an "aesthetic response to the quandary of 'invisibility'" (89). The film uses gay iconography, but conforms to codes of sexual representation through self-censorship. It enables gay readings and protects gay culture from being pinned down and pathologized by objectifying discourses. It also foreshadows the visibility of the late sixties. Although it is now canonized in gay cinema, few gay men saw it upon release. Still, its myth served as evidence of homosexuality and as currency for white gay men. It is an allegory for "the limitations and interdictions homosexuality has encountered on public as well as private levels of acknowledgement."

In this simple film—one shot, real time—sex is everywhere as discourse. It is a film about the process of watching a film and making meaning with it. Minimal denotation presents a wide range of connotations through title, framing, lighting, background, figure, non-narrative, no sound, slowed film. A charged, provocative irony comes out of the instability and fluidity of this image. Grundmann's argues that *Blow Job* mobilizes the following tensions:

invisible and visible

passing and posing

latent and the manifest.

the historical and theoretical tension between gay visibility and invisibility

dual impressions of this man's relationship to camera

high art/popular culture

fact/fiction

the disciplined viewer and open text

documentary/aestheticization, fabrication and artifice

light/dark

it visualizes unmanageable oppositions of myth like God/man, insider/outsider, saint/demon,

authentic individual/reified clone.

It feeds into our desire to reconcile nature/culture, science/faith, logic/rhetoric.
Is the audience performing or being performed upon?
Does the man acknowledge the camera or not?

The spectator speculates on the film's mobilization of these discourses, which, like myth, negotiate binaries, and articulate and spatialize the structures of Foucault's *scientia sexualis* (the proliferation of medical, legal, social, etc. discourses around sex and sexuality to regulate behavior and the body in relationships of power that produce sex acts as objects of knowledge and individual subjectivity as truth).

Grundmann argues that *Blow Job*'s intertextuality—its “citational frenzy”—and self-reflexive appropriation of sex, gender and sexuality paradigms prompt the viewer to question these conventions, but also to invest them with their own desire without providing any new way of understanding these constructs

Blow Job, according to Grundmann, is paradoxically the product of a gay sensibility (sex is an aesthetic experience mediated by multiple contexts) and an expression of white gay male identity, but not a gay film; it is an appropriation of discourses of sexuality, and these discourses are heteronormative. But homosexuality is integral to the film, even as it is suppressed, because heterosexuality has been constructed historically in opposition to homosexuality, through its disavowal and oppression.

Grundmann sees *Blow Job* as an idiom of gay performance that creates a simulacrum and subversively rearticulates masculinity by reenacting dynamics of gay male self-assertion in various areas of the American public sphere. White gay male gender performance appropriates masculinity and collapses desire and identification into the mimetic self-consciousness of cruising. By using icons to allude to illicit sex and gay male practices, the film image “thus homosexualizes a spectrum of masculinities.”

He extensively theorizes white gay male identity and agency, setting up the illicit nature of gay male sexuality as a central context of *Blow Job* through the psychoanalytic concept of “hypochondria” and Leo Bersani's conceptions of anal sex and abjection, in contrast to David Halperin and liberal pluralism's depoliticization of homosexuality as a lifestyle.

He also writes on the use of the Other and whiteness. Sex is displaced onto the metaphor of darkness that link sex and gender to race and mobilize discourses of difference through the “primitive,” “savage,” and taboo depiction of sex. Grundmann sees *Blow Job* as a subversion of this value system which ends up reifying its terms, through the link of light to whiteness and transcendence. He explores these issues with respect to the “White Negro,” the hipster, and the Beats.